

Seasonings is catering company with a cause with YRFN



A new local catering company is cooking for a cause, working to highlight the realities of food insecurity while highlighting local solutions while adding flavour to your event.

Seasonings is a new initiative launched by the York Region Food Network and its resident Chef Maxine Knight.

For events big and small, offerings from Seasonings highlight local, seasonal produce with proceeds going back to York Region Food Network's (YRFN) food security and education initiatives.

"We create our food seasonally and we don't necessarily like to stick to a recipe," says Chef Knight. "We always try to move through the seasons with whatever we choose to prepare. As we were doing this, and people often enjoy the food we make when we have events here or cooking classes, we thought this was a great way to support the work we do. We can also show people outside of our immediate communities we work with what we do through the catering menu, how we prepare the food and have those healthy and nutritious foods prepared."

Seasonings started with the idea of how to share this concept with a wider audience while also bringing more awareness to the YRFN.

When Chef Maxine started her culinary career, she says she wanted to be a "big name" and worked in many different environments from fine dining to vegan raw catering. But, when she first stepped into the YRFN's community kitchen on Industrial Parkway North, she said the "reality of food hit me."

"All the environments I cooked in, for the most part, were for people who maybe had a little bit more disposable resources; you could take a nice high-end vacation or got to a fine dining restaurant," she says. "When I came here, I started working more with just the community. I was working with a lot of immigrant communities and saw how passionate, creative [they were] and how differently people did things. When you start getting to know people, you start hearing the challenges and the struggles. It became a passion of just understanding that food is a right and we should all have it - and not everybody does. That reality started to hit me."

"Cooking to promote either one's self, a style of cuisine, or something like that, completely lost its appeal and it was the reality that food is a right everyone should have but they don't spurred on my interest in wanting to be here, work with communities, and use foods as a vehicle to encourage that community-building, breaking down racial barriers to encourage knowledge about the benefits of good food and giving access to fresh food that maybe some communities don't have."

The establishment of Seasonings, it is hoped, will help further that fresh food goal ? featuring a small but full menu of items that are just that.

Three main items are currently on the menu, including a potato and bacon quiche using local veggies, including garlic scapes for an extra punch of flavour, along with spinach, kale, and/or Swiss chard, harvested from the YRFN's community gardens and sourced from local farmers.

Falafel are another menu option, seasoned with local herbs, and, finally, there's a sandwich to suit many tastes.

?Who doesn't want a good, tasty sandwich?? asks Chef Maxine. ?It's made from roasted veggies like onions, mushroom, zucchini, and eggplant, or it might be sweet potato. Depending on what it is, it's a really nice, hearty, vegetarian-based sandwich with a really nice, zesty, sundried tomato and pesto mayo. Each of those options come with a side salad reflecting the season we're in. During the summer months, you're going to see more of the leafy things, fresher produce. Over the colder months, more of our grains and legumes that are made into a salad. There's a lot of flexibility, lots of vegetarian options, and lots of gluten-free options as well.

?Spices and herbs are the backbone. If your food isn't seasoned properly ? pun intended ? it really falls flat. When we eat something, we want to make sure the flavours are coming alive. My background is the Caribbean where we use a lot of herbs in our cooking. You'll find a lot of that influence in our food. The flavour profile will depend on what the actual dish is that we're making and we can definitely expect to have bursts of flavour, some interest and excitement from whatever it is we make.?

For more on the York Region Food Network, visit yrfn.ca.

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